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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis that lessons which demand student involvement through leading a short discussion of required reading would result in greater attitude change in a liberal direction than would lessons taught by the lecture/discussion method was tested. Using members of four sections of a university course in communication, three sections received lessons about freedom of speech while the fourth section served as a control group. Two of the experimental groups were assigned to the lecture/discussion method, and one was assigned to a reports on readings by students/discussion method. Two of the experimental groups and the control group were pretested as to attitudes concerning free speech issues, and all four groups were posttested. As in a previous study, all three experimental groups who had participated in free-speech lessons showed attitude shifts in a liberal direction. The report/discussion group had the highest posttest mean. All experimental groups showed more permissive attitudes than did the control group. An appendix presents the questionnaire used to measure the students' attitudes. (DB)

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THE EFFECTS OF VARIOUS METHODS OF TEACHING ABOUT FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON ATTITUDES ABOUT FREE SPEECH ISSUES

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Recently reported research indicates that lessons about freedom of speech seem to have a slightly liberalizing effect on students' attitudes about free speech issues.[1] However this research dealt only with lessons presented using the lecture/discussion method. As yet there is no research dealing with the effects of lessons about freedom of speech when taught using other teaching methods. Since the lecture/discussion method affords the opportunity for individual students to remain relatively uninvolved in class activities if they choose to do so, the present study was designed to determine if teaching techniques which demand varying amounts of involvement in class activities by students would result in different amounts of attitude change about free speech issues. Specifically, it was hypothesized that lessons which demand involvement by requiring each student to lead a short discussion about an assigned reading would result in a greater attitude change in a liberal direction than would lessons taught in the lecture/discussion fashion in which the instructor lectures and students participate in class discussion only if they choose to do so. Since attitude changes in the earlier study were not statistically significant, a second purpose of the present study was to determine if the changes observed in the earlier study, however slight they may have been, would again be exhibited by students who participated in the free speech lessons when compared to a control group.

Subjects

The subjects in the experiment consisted of members of four sections of the basic course in communication at Ohio University during the spring quarter of 1969. At the time the course was one of two from which students could choose to fulfill a graduation requirement, so the subjects were fairly representative of the student body of Ohio University.

The Instrument for Measuring Attitudes Toward Free Speech Issues

Subjects' attitudes were measured with a questionnaire designed by the experimenter (see Appendix A). It consisted of 25 statements about free speech issues. The subjects responded to each of the statements with ratings of from 1 to 5 to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements. Twelve of the items were worded so that a low rating indicated a permissive attitude and thirteen were worded so that a higher rating indicated a permissive attitude toward the free speech issue. The questionnaire was

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scored so that most permissive responses received a score of five while least permissive responses received a score of one. Thus, the possible range of scores was from 25 to 125. The subjects' responses ranged from 60 to 123. The mean was 91.75 and the standard deviation was 14.50. The split-half reliability coefficient corrected with the Spearman-Brown formula was .89. Each of the twenty-five items correlated positively with overall test score. These test statistics were all computed using the pretest responses. Since the questionnaire requires an overt and direct response to a wide variety of issues related to freedom of speech, it was felt that a single score for each subject based on all of the items could be considered a valid reflection of the subject's attitude toward freedom of speech.

Methods

The design of the experiment was a modification of the Solomon Four-Group design.[2] The treatments are described in Table 1.

Table 1

THE TREATMENTS

Group	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
1	Yes	Lecture by the instructor with discussions	Yes
2	Yes	Reports on readings by students with discussion	Yes
3	No	Lecture by the instructor with discussions	Yes
4	Yes	No lessons	Yes

Three of the sections received lessons about freedom of speech while the fourth section served as a control group which took both the pretest and the posttest but did not have the free speech lessons.

The number of subjects on which the analysis was based was the number in each section which took the pretest and the posttest. Subjects were randomly discarded to equalize the number of subjects in the groups.

The three sections taught by the experimenter were randomly assigned to the three experimental treatments. The fourth group was a randomly selected section of the introductory course which was tested at the same time as the experimental groups.

In the lecture/discussion sections the experimenter lectured and led the class discussion. The subjects were encouraged to read articles which had been placed in the reserve room at the library. In the report/discussion section each subject was required to lead the class for 10 minutes during which he presented a brief summary of an article he had read and led discussion on the topic of the reading. Subjects chose their reading assignments from a list provided by the instructor.[3] The investigator spoke minimally in the report/discussion classes.

All of the pretests were administered the first day of classes, during the spring quarter, 1969. The subjects who received the free speech lessons were all required to buy and read a text about freedom of speech.[4] During the fifth and sixth weeks of classes, three fifty-minute class periods were used for the lessons about freedom of speech. One class period was devoted to academic freedom; one was devoted to speech that endangers national security; and one was devoted to offensive communication and censorship. All of the lessons were informative in nature. On the class period immediately following the third class period, all subjects were again tested with the free speech attitude questionnaire and given a subject matter test over the contents of the discussions and the readings.

Results

The means and standard deviations for the four groups are found in Table 2.

The pretest means of the pretested group were almost identical. Analysis of variance indicated that there were no overall differences among the four posttest means. See Table 3.

The primary interest of the study was the assessment of differences between the two teaching methods so a t-test was computed despite the fact that no overall difference among the four means was found. The t-test indicated there was no significant difference between the posttest means for the pretested groups taught by the two different methods.

The second purpose of the present study was to determine if the differences noted in the earlier study would again be found. In the earlier study, all three of the sections which participated in free speech lessons had attitude shifts in a liberal direction.[5] The same thing occurred in the present study. As determined by using the binomial distribution, the chances of all six posttest means differing from the pretest means in a given direction is

less than five in one hundred.[6]

Table 2

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR THE GROUPS

Group	N	Pretest Mean	s.d.	N	Posttest Mean	s.d.
Lecture/discussion	12	91.25	9.54	12	93.42	10.26
Report/discussion	12	91.50	25.16	12	98.25	15.13
Lecture/discussion	12	no pretest		12	94.33	13.99
Control group	12	92.00	11.92	12	88.33	16.14

Table 3

SUMMARY OF VARIANCE FOR DIFFERENCES AMONG MEAN POSTTEST SCORES FOR THE FOUR GROUPS

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between groups	620.416	3	206.805	1.00
Within Groups	9,093.504	44	206.671	
Total	9,713.920	47		

Discussion

Although the four posttest means in the present study did not differ significantly from one another, the shifts of the means were all as would be expected. The lecture/discussion group that was not pretested responded slightly more permissively than did the pretested lecture/discussion group.[7]

Of major interest is the posttest mean of the report/discussion group. This group had the highest posttest mean. The posttest mean for the no-treatment group was lower than its pretest mean. This might logically be attributed to a regression effect toward the score of 75, the median score of the questionnaire's possible range of 25 to 125. All of the groups receiving free speech lessons of any kind indicated more permissive attitudes than did the control group.

In conclusion it appears that lessons about freedom of speech may be depended upon to change students' attitudes toward free speech issues slightly in a liberal direction. It further appears that the amount of student involvement and activity during those lessons might be an important factor in the amount of change elicited. In the present study, the greater student involvement and activity in the report/discussion classes resulted in greater change than in any of the other groups examined. An important limit of the present study was the fact that all of the experimental groups in the study were instructed by the investigator who was fully aware of the experimental hypotheses. Despite concerted attempts to control behavior that might bias results, one can never be sure that such control has been adequate. Therefore, future research dealing with effects of various methods of teaching about freedom of speech on free speech attitudes might reexamine the effects of the two methods used here with a "double-blind" approach in which the instructors as well as the students are unaware of the design of the experiment or the hypotheses being tested. Future research might also profitably direct its attention to the effects of other types of teaching techniques not examined in this study.

Appendix A

Name _____ Age_____ Sex_____ Class_____
Date _____ Section_____

Below are some statements concerning freedom of speech. On the line to the left of each statement, write a number from 1 to 5 to reflect how you feel about each statement. Be sure to respond to each statement. These numbers should have the following meanings:

1. I totally disagree with this statement.
2. I disagree more than I agree with this statement.
3. I don't know.
4. I agree more than I disagree with this statement.
5. I totally agree with this statement.

__*__ 1. Freedom of speech should be denied to those who abuse it.

__*__ 2. There is some literature that is obscene so censorship for the

public good is desirable.

_____ 3. Communists should have free speech guaranteed them in the United States.

_____ 4. Loyalty oaths are a serious abridgment of academic freedom.

_____ 5. The right to distribute racist, hate literature should be protected as an aspect of free speech.

_____ 6. Academic freedom should protect the right to discuss subversive ideas alien to American democracy.

__*__ 7. Freedom of speech should only be granted to loyal citizens.

__*__ 8. If some people find someone's speech offensive, that speech should not be guaranteed the protection of free speech.

__*__ 9. Free speech should be denied those who propose the restriction of free speech.

_____10. Atheists should be allowed to teach in public schools.

_____11. Censorship is a serious restriction on artistic freedom.

__*__ 12. People who only find fault without offering solutions are misusing their right to free speech.

__*__ 13. It is reasonable to suspect the loyalty of a laywer who represents accused communists before a congressional committee.

_____14. The political beliefs of university faculty members should not be investigated.

__*__ 15. Publications describing positive aspects of homosexuality should be banned from newstands.

_____16. Communists should be allowed to teach in public schools under the same conditions as everyone else.

__*__ 17. Groups of persons who disagree with our form of government should be prohibited from holding public meetings.

__*__ 18. It should be illegal to speak against racial or religious groups.

_____19. Communist newspapers and literature should be available to anyone desiring them.

_____ 20. Without academic freedom, society would suffer greatly.

_____ 21. Our laws are too strict about obscene literature and films.

___*___ 22. There is generally little reason to hear minority opinions since they usually contribute little and only slow down decision making.

___*___ 23. Comic books and literature for children should be screened by a government agency before publication to decrease the amoung of objectionable material.

_____ 24. Government wire-tapping should be opposed.

_____ 25. It would be all right for junior high school age students to read Playboy magazine.

*To reflect a permissive attitude it is necessary to disagree with these items. Hence for these items a rating of 1 is converted to a 5 in scoring; 2 is converted to a score of 4; etc.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Charles M. Rossiter, Jr., "Teaching About Freedom of Speech in the Basic Course," 1969 Yearbook of the Freedom of Speech Committee of the Speech Association of America, eds. George P. Rice and Haig Bosmajian, pp. 56-61.

[2]D. T. Campbell, "Factors Relevant to the Validity of Experiments in Social Settings," Psychological Bulletin, 54 (July, 1957), pp. 297-312.

[3]The readings were all from textbooks that dealt with freedom of speech and were selected for their objective analyses of free speech issues. The selections were informative in nature, advocating neither a conservative nor liberal viewpoint. Milton R. Konvitz, "Loyalty Oaths and Guilt by Association," in M. Konvitz, Fundamental Liberties of a Free People, (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 229-269, would be typical of the readings.

[4]Robert M. O'Neil, Free Speech: Responsible Communication Under Law, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1966).

[5]Rossiter, p. 58.

[6]The method used is the sign test described in N. M. Downie and R. W. Heath, Basic Statistical Methods, (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 208-209. The probability was determined by using Pascal's triangle in Downie and Heath, pp. 106-107.

[7]William Brooks, "Effects of the Persuasive Message Upon Attitudes: A Methodological Comparison of an Offset Before-After Design with a Pretest-Posttest Design," Journal of Communication, 16 (September, 1966), pp. 180-188.